

Session Six

**You Can Be Your Own Worst Enemy
Or Your Own Best Friend**

6

Session Six

You Can Be Your Own Worst Enemy...or Your Own Best Friend

The NDEP strongly encourages inviting a medical person (health care provider or certified diabetes educator) to participate in any sessions that you conduct to provide support for the discussion and to answer any specific medical questions that may arise.

Background

Stress can bring out the worst or best in a person. Sometimes people actually punish themselves in stressful situations by doing things that are bad for their health or destructive to their self-esteem.

Objectives

1. To discuss ways in which Calvin shows behaviors and attitudes that work against him.
2. To describe ways in which Calvin acts as his own best friend to help him deal with stress.
3. To discuss how a person can be his or her own worst enemy or best friend.
4. To identify ways in which a person can break self-destructive habits and build positive ones.



Time needed for discussion: 45 to 60 minutes.

Materials

- DVD of the film *The Debilitator*.
- DVD player/TV monitor.

For instructions on borrowing *The Debilitator* film, see page 4 of this guide.

The handout *Home Exercise* can be found at the end of this session (after page 52).

- Pens or pencils, paper, and an envelope for each member of the group (including the facilitator).
- Stamps for mailing each envelope.
- Handout: *Home Exercise* (included in this discussion guide kit; make one copy for each participant).
- Optional: Flipchart or blackboard for writing down key words from discussion.

Method

- Conduct a facilitated discussion (group discussion with a leader asking stimulation questions).
- Play the film, or select scenes from the film as needed.

Introduce the session with this background concept: Stress can bring out the worst or best in a person. Sometimes people actually punish themselves in stressful situations by doing things that are bad for their health or destructive to their self-esteem.



DVD

1. **Tell the group:** I'd like you to identify some of the things Calvin does that work against him, and why he does them. Sometimes the "reason" a person does something is not a factual explanation but an attitude or an emotion. *[You may want to write key words from the discussion on a flipchart or blackboard.]*



Make sure that the discussion brings out the following points about the actions that Calvin takes that work against him and make him his own worst enemy:

- Action: In Calvin's dream, Calvin's daughter finds him eating large portions of unhealthful foods while he is sitting in front of the TV.

Possible reasons:

- He's tired, and this is how he relaxes.
- These foods taste good.
- He eats more when he is stressed or tired.

- He doesn't want to think about whether the foods are healthful or not.
- Others?
- Action: Calvin tells his daughter to leave him alone when she tries to help him.

Possible reasons:

- He knows that she's right, but he doesn't want to think about what she is saying and is annoyed.
- He doesn't want to face his diabetes.
- It's the wrong time for this discussion because he's tired.
- He feels that she is nagging or accusing him.
- Others?
- Action: The first time that Calvin is told that he has diabetes, he hides this fact from his wife.

Possible reasons:

- Denial. He doesn't want to believe the diagnosis.
- He doesn't want to worry her. Perhaps he is worried about his job as a truck driver or about his insurance.
- Others?
- Action: Calvin doesn't go back to the first doctor for follow-up.

Possible reasons:

- Denial. He doesn't want to believe that it's important to do so.
- Excuses. Maybe Calvin doesn't want to take the time off from work, or maybe his work schedule makes it hard for him to keep a regular appointment.

2. **Ask:** But aren't these the excuses that your own worst enemy would give?
3. **Ask the group:** What does it mean to be your own best friend? What kind of actions does a best friend take to help you out?



Make sure that the discussion brings out the following points:

- A best friend is kind but doesn't let you make excuses.
 - A best friend helps you decide what you want to do without telling you what to do.
 - A best friend might not be as hard on you as you are on yourself, but he or she would still point out the things that you are doing that are harmful. For example, a best friend might suggest that it's no use feeling guilty about past overeating, but that you might want to get rid of those potato chips you have in the house if you really plan to quit "pigging out" in front of the TV.
 - A best friend reminds you to think about what's most important to you.
4. **Ask the group:** In the film, how does Calvin show that he can also be his own best friend?



Make sure that the discussion brings out the following points:

- Action: Calvin faces thinking about the bad dream that he had.

Possible reasons:

- He knows deep inside that there is some truth to the dream.
- He wants to protect his family from losing him.
- The dream "shook him up" enough that now he's ready to face reality and do something about his diabetes.
- Others?

- Action: Calvin listens to and thinks about the doctor's advice.

Possible reasons:

- He is willing to try something new because what he has been doing isn't working well for his health.
 - He is willing to take charge and to take action.
 - He is willing to ask for help.
 - Others?
- Action: Calvin shares his concerns with his family members.

Possible reasons:

- They are important to him.
- They can help.
- They can give more help if they know what's going on.
- He doesn't want to scare them, but he thinks that they should know what he's feeling.
- His dream had a serious impact on him and gave him the push that he needed to go to the doctor, and he wants them to know about it.
- Others?

5. **Ask the group:** Are you ever your own worst enemy? Can you give examples?

Examples might include:

- Feeling guilty.
- Telling yourself that you are no good, that you can't do anything right, that you brought this on yourself, and that you'll never change.
- Worrying about everyone else, so that you don't take care of yourself.

- Feeling fearful of facing the truth.
- Seeking out people who are even worse off than you (so that you can feel better), but who lead you to do unhealthy things (such as drinking too much alcohol, being angry at everyone, and blaming others instead of making changes).
- Being angry (at yourself, at others, at how unfair life is).
- Others?

6. **Ask:** Are you ever your own best friend? Can you give examples?

Examples might include:

- Telling yourself you can do it (power of positive thinking).
- “Patting yourself on the back” for making good changes, including small ones.
- Giving yourself credit for problem-solving.
- Asking for what you need (such as help with getting more physical activity, restaurant food that is prepared healthfully, or kind words instead of criticisms from friends and family).
- Sharing your fears (instead of always trying to be the “pillar of strength” for everyone else).
- Seeking out positive people who have energy and an upbeat attitude.
- Telling yourself that you deserve to have a healthy body, a second chance, time to yourself, the right to love yourself the way you are, and the right to ask for help.

7. **Ask:** How can you be your own best friend?

If the following points haven’t already been addressed in discussion, consider bringing them out now:

- Don’t beat up on yourself.

- But don't let yourself get away with excuses, either. Excuses are your own worst enemy talking.
 - Be kind to yourself. Imagine putting an arm around yourself and thinking about what you could say that would be helpful. Everyone needs comfort, but can it be from a hot bath, from a phone call to an old friend, or from a walk alone with the dog instead of from eating?
 - Sometimes being your own best friend means allowing yourself to grieve—letting your emotions out about loss (of independence, of a loved one, of your health) or about your fears (of possible complications of diabetes, of disability, of death) so that you can move on. A best friend wouldn't tell you to "just hold it all in."
8. **Ask the group:** Think back to a very stressful time in your life. Imagine that you can go back in time to comfort yourself, to offer help, or even just to offer a shoulder to cry on. What would you tell yourself?
9. **Ask:** Is anyone willing to share a story or an example?



Classroom Exercises

1. Your Own Best Friend Versus Your Own Worst Enemy

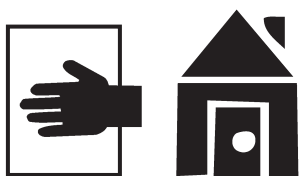
Consider using the mental image of a best friend leaning over one shoulder and a worst enemy hovering over the other. A worst enemy doesn't just tempt you with overeating or other unhealthy behaviors; he or she also beats up on you emotionally so that you keep hurting yourself. A best friend puts a comforting arm around your shoulder, offers a kind helping hand, and asks you to forgive yourself so that you can do better next time.

Note: This next exercise provides the opportunity for participants to learn how to coach themselves with positive and comforting thoughts by asking them to imagine being their own best friend. Having the leader collect the participants' letters and mail them later can

help boost morale and remind people of this technique.

2. Letter-Writing Exercise

- Hand out paper, pens or pencils, and envelopes.
- Ask participants to address the envelopes to themselves.
- Ask participants to take 5 to 10 minutes to imagine being their own best friend.
- Ask each person to write a letter to himself or herself as his or her own best friend.
- Ask participants to seal the letter inside the self-addressed envelope and turn it in to the discussion leader/facilitator.
- Mail the letters 2 days after the session.



Home Exercise

1. Give out one copy of the handout *Home Exercise* to each participant.
2. If there is time, review some of the worst enemy/best friend examples from the handout.
3. Ask group members to take the handout home and to fill out the reverse side of the handout with some of their own worst enemy/best friend examples. Ask them to record how they sometimes act as their own worst enemy, how they can also be their own best friend, and what they would say to themselves to help with frustrations or in times of struggle. (**Note:** Consider asking participants to bring their completed form back to the next session to discuss and share ideas.)



Handout for Session Six

Home Exercise

Being Your Own Worst Enemy	Being Your Own Best Friend
Feeling guilty.	Telling yourself to give yourself a break and to do things differently next time.
Telling yourself that you are no good, can't do anything right, brought this on yourself, and will never change.	Reminding yourself that everybody makes mistakes sometimes, that it's never too late to make a change; telling yourself that you can do it (power of positive thinking).
Worrying about everyone else, so that you don't take care of yourself.	Reminding yourself that you have to take care of yourself if you are going to be there for your family.
Being fearful of facing the truth.	Seeking support from friends, family, and faith.
Seeking out people who are even worse off than you (so that you can feel better), but who lead you to do unhealthy things (such as drinking too much alcohol, being angry at everyone, blaming others instead of making changes).	Seeking out positive people who have energy and an upbeat attitude.
Belittling everything and thinking that, even when you make a change, it is always too small and is never enough (for example, criticizing yourself for losing only 5 pounds when you want to lose 50).	"Patting yourself on the back" for making good changes, including small steps; giving yourself credit for problem-solving.
Feeling that you can't look weak because everyone looks up to you and you would lose respect if you asked for help.	Sharing your fears and not always trying to be the "pillar of strength" for everyone else; realizing that people respect those who are self-confident enough to ask for help.
Feeling that standing up for yourself is selfish and that you will embarrass yourself or your family (for example, that you'll insult the hostess if you make your requirements for healthful food known).	Asking for what you need (for example, help with getting physical activity, healthfully prepared food, or kind words instead of criticisms).
Providing excuses for others' behavior.	Not blaming yourself ("they're right, I deserve it") but speaking directly; telling others to suggest ways that they can help instead of offering criticisms.
WRITE IN YOUR OWN EXAMPLES ON THE REVERSE SIDE	

